

## Does Faith Make for a Better Chance to Win the Super Bowl?

From time to time we hear athletes crediting God for their abilities on the court or playing field. As the 2018 Super Bowl approaches there have been reports of the Philadelphia Eagles being a team with a culture of faith. If this is true, does this improve their chances to win the Super Bowl? The answer to that question depends on the depth of the question. Does God care who wins a football game? I think the simple answer to the mere won-loss question is likely a “no.” But if the question is about how can God’s Kingdom benefit from players emphasizing their faith, then that is an entirely different question.



Please understand this devotion is not taking sides about who should win the Super Bowl. It is, however, a statement about how people in the public eye can effectively model their faith for others to see.

Here are some of the things I have read about the Eagles culture of faith. One of the Eagles players, Steven Means, said we “push each other in certain areas that we are flawed at and open ourselves up to each other. We text each other throughout the day making sure that everybody is on the right path and doing the right thing.” Pro bowl tight end Zach Ertz said his teammates hold him accountable off the field. “We truly care about each other, we truly care about the growth that each individual has in the Word, as believers, as well as friends and family.” We think of football players as battle-hardened athletes. It is unusual to think of football players whose strength comes from showing their weakness to each other and building each other up. Yet, the Bible encourages them: *Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing (1 Thessalonians 5:11).*

The team has a solid core of Christian players whose faith is an inspiration for their life journey. Spiritual leadership on this team is said to come from some of the younger players, starting with injured quarterback Caron Wentz. During the season Wentz received lots of criticism from the news media and fans because he openly talked about his faith on social media. Yet, he didn’t let the criticism deter him from continuing to share his faith. Wentz said, “Jesus was persecuted everywhere he went. So if Jesus, who is our ultimate example, endured that, then I can endure a couple of tweets or a little riff-raff here and there.” Many Eagle players meet for Bible study on Thursdays and the night before games there is a prayer and devotional time for players and their spouses. They have even conducted baptisms of players who are willing to give their life to Christ. Members of the team have put their faith into action by ministering to people in their community who are sick. Defensive end Chris Long has donated his entire 2017 salary to various charities in the communities where he had played in during his career. The team from the “City of Brotherly Love” is known for its “brotherly love” to each other.

The team culture of faith doesn’t mean the team will have divine assistance to win the Super Bowl game. It does, however, provide a much greater likelihood the team will function better together as a team, which will improve their chances. They exemplify The Great Commission, which says, *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).* The last line tells us Jesus will be with them as they profess and share their faith, but it doesn’t guarantee a win – at least, on the field. God’s objective is winning souls, not games. But, the team’s actions are very public with the opportunity to impact millions of people.

We, too, have a stage to model Christian behavior – at work, in our families and our community. It may not be on national television, but souls are won one person at a time. Sharing the faith is just the first step. The Holy Spirit then enters into those who are receptive. Do what you can to start the process. How about you? Do you take advantage of opportunities to share and model your faith?

The question in the title of this devotional asks if being a person of faith increases our chance for success. In all probability faith does increase the potential to win the game – not because God wills it to happen, but because of the unified teamwork attitude, genuine respect and encouragement for each other demonstrated by the Eagles. Keep in mind, however, that God’s victory is eternal, not the 60 minutes of the Super Bowl. The goal line that may get crossed on Super Bowl Sunday is introducing people of this world to a God who loves them and wants them to develop as a person and to share in the benefit from Christ’s crown of victory.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father. We each have an opportunity to model Christian behavior and to encourage others to grow in the faith. Help us to grow in our own faith and give us the courage to not back away from opportunities to plant the seeds that may bring others closer to you. Amen.

*Note: The quotes from the Eagle’s players were printed in an Associated Press article in the January 29, 2018 Winston-Salem Journal.*